



# PRIME MINISTER

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

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ON THE OCCASION OF THE HANDOVER  
OF THE FIRST PACIFIC PATROL BOAT TO  
PAPUA NEW GUINEA  
FREMANTLE - 16 MAY 1987

Nearly four years ago, in August 1983, I announced that Australia would develop, in conjunction with a number of South Pacific nations, a Pacific Patrol Boat to meet our common aspirations for a peaceful and productive Pacific region.

It is therefore a tremendous personal pleasure to be here today to hand over the first of those Patrol Boats.

Let me, first of all, welcome the representatives of our fellow members of the South Pacific Forum which are participants in the Patrol Boat program : Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Western Samoa and the Cook Islands. It gives me great pleasure to be here today with you all.

That pleasure is, however, qualified by events in Fiji, which have led to the absence of its representative, Brigadier Nailatikau, the Commander of the Royal Fiji Military Forces, who is preoccupied with events in his own country.

I made the Australian Government's attitude to events in Fiji very clear in Parliament on Thursday. Let me reiterate now the very strong hope of the Government and people of this country that parliamentary democracy will be speedily restored there.

The Australian Government accepts that the security and stability of our region is fundamental to our own security and we see the Pacific Patrol Boat as an important initiative to that end. The project is the largest project, ever undertaken through our Defence Co-operation Program, in terms of both its regional scope and capital investment. It complements Australia's existing defence interests and activities in the Pacific region.

The Defence Minister, Kim Beazley, recently announced some other initiatives to further develop our regional defence presence, including increased patrols in the Pacific by Australian Defence Force ships and aircraft, and increased assistance to regional states.

The Government's recent White Paper, The Defence of Australia, confirmed that we will continue our efforts to contribute to regional security in concert with our neighbours, and that we will maintain our capability to operate throughout our region of primary strategic interest.

It is particularly appropriate that the first of the patrol Boats should be handed over to the nation with whom we have a special relationship, Papua New Guinea.

Papua New Guinea's special relationship with Australia makes it a natural focus for defence co-operation.

Our Defence Forces maintain a close working relationship, including annual consultations at the highest level; the attachment of specialist Australian Defence Force personnel to the Papua New Guinea Defence Force; the stationing of Australian units in Papua New Guinea, particularly technical training staff; combined exercises; and other activities.

It is a measure of Australia's continuing commitment to this relationship that we are providing some \$22.8 million to support these activities in 1986-87.

When I was in Port Moresby in September 1985 for the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of Papua New Guinea's independence, I discussed with the then Prime Minister the mutual benefit that would be derived from Papua New Guinea's participation in the Patrol Boat Project. I was delighted that Papua New Guinea decided to join the Project.

This is the first of four Patrol Boats that Papua New Guinea is to operate and it serves as a clear example of the benefits to be derived from the overall program.

These benefits are not purely security ones - though they are of growing importance in a region which is increasingly becoming a focus of international attention.

The boats are also a practical response to the economic imperatives of the participating countries. They are designed to meet in a practical way the common need expressed by nations of the South Pacific for an effective means of patrolling their Exclusive Economic Zones.

Australia is aware of the difficulties which Pacific Island countries have had in resisting the intrusions of the deep-sea fishing states and the derogations which these make from the political and economic sovereignty of regional states.

The project recognises the aspiration of the South Pacific countries to achieve economic independence and the fact that marine resources are vital to the achievement of that aspiration.

The new boats will also assist South Pacific nations to establish or further develop their regional maritime capabilities and, at the same time, will encourage surveillance co-operation within the region. As well, the Pacific Patrol Boat will provide a valuable capability for disaster relief, medical evacuation and search and rescue operations.

As significant as Today's handover is for the nations of the South Pacific, it is also a notable achievement for Australian industry and, in particular, for Australian Shipbuilding Industries.

I understand that ASI provided an outstanding response to the Pacific Patrol Boat tender. The ASI design was longer, larger, and was considered more capable of handling rough weather and of being easily repaired if damaged.

I am pleased to hear that ASI's interest in the Pacific Islands is being extended beyond the area of defence work to broader economic concerns. I understand ASI is proposing joint ventures with Pacific Island nations which will give those nations a larger share in harvesting the wealth of their fishing zones. The Government welcomes such proposals, which clearly reflect the linkage which we have always emphasised between sovereignty and security on the one hand, and economic development on the other.

As far as Australia's general shipbuilding industry is concerned, Australia's planned defence projects will provide a significant impetus. As the White Paper notes, the extensive defence work planned to be undertaken in Australia will draw heavily on local expertise and resources.

The Government plans to start building the new surface combatant vessel at about the same time as the new submarines for the Royal Australian Navy. Together with projects for minehunters and other vessels, the total value of this defence shipbuilding program will be of the order of eight billion dollars. Australian industry involvement in these projects is expected to be high.

Over this period too, up to half the fleet will move to a permanent station in Western Australia. This relocation will require the build up of repair, refit and maintenance facilities here in Western Australia capable of supporting a range of Naval vessels from submarines and destroyers to survey and supply ships.

As part of this initiative the Department of Defence is buying, at a cost of about \$6 million, a large second-hand floating dock to accommodate ship sizes up to the largest in the fleet. The dock will be provided for use by industry in Western Australia free of charge for defence work and at a reasonable rate of hire for commercial work. The local share in this project will be to build the mooring and shore facilities to accommodate the dock.

It must be understood, however, that the Government is not interested in developing industries that are dependent on Australian defence requirements alone for their survival. The high technology nature of the Government's defence requirements complements the Government's industry policy approach which is directed towards the restructuring and revitalisation of manufacturing industry to ensure it is more internationally competitive, export-oriented and innovative.

For all these reasons and, most importantly, because of the valuable contribution that the Pacific Patrol Boat can be expected to make to regional security, it gives me great pleasure to present formally the first Pacific Patrol Boat to Papua New Guinea's Defence Minister, the Honourable Stephen Tago.

Today's handover of HMPNGS TARANGAU serves as a visible example and reminder of the co-operative approach to security and economic prosperity which forms such a valuable base to relationships between South Pacific Forum countries.

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